

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 9, 2010

Agenda Item: Riverdale Ranch Conservation Easement Proposal

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule/Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background

The 850-acre Riverdale Ranch is located 5 miles south of Ulm in Cascade County. It possesses riparian, emergent and forested wetlands, shrub and native grassland communities important to deer, antelope, upland game birds, waterfowl and nongame wildlife. The property, which contains 5 miles of Missouri River frontage, is managed as a working farm for wheat and cattle production, while maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. The Missouri River has some of the best year round cover for white-tailed deer, waterfowl, upland game birds and non-game species in Region 4. The landowners allow access for big game, waterfowl, upland game bird hunting, and for wildlife viewing. FWP is partnering with USDA Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program, PPL Montana, Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust, NWTF, SCI, PF and landowner donation to purchase a conservation easement from Riverdale Ranch. The FWP Commission endorsed the course of action on April 17, 2008.

Public Involvement Process & Results

- A public comment period was established for the EA, Management Plan and Socioeconomic Analysis from Aug. 10—Sept. 10. A public meeting, attended by 12 people, was held at the Ulm School on Aug. 24.
- Written comments totaled 30 (27 supportive of Proposed Action, 3 opposed to Proposed Action). Public comment is distilled in the Decision Notice to the EA. All comments received remain on file at the Great Falls FWP office and are available for public review.

Alternatives and Analysis

PROPOSED ACTION: FWP to purchase, hold and monitor a conservation easement on Riverdale Ranch.

Alternative A - No Action: Riverdale Ranch would continue to be managed as in the past but there would be no guarantee of the preservation of agricultural values, wildlife habitat, open space, historic sites, recreational values and other resources as they are found on the ranch.

Alternative B - Fee Title Purchase: The landowner initiated the conservation easement process with FWP and at no point expressed interest in fee title sale or a long-term lease.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends approval by the FWP Commission to purchase a conservation easement from Riverdale Ranch with FWP's Habitat Montana and Upland Game Bird Program funds with cooperation from partner dollars. This project will conserve and protect important riparian/wetland habitats along the Missouri River while providing public hunting and wildlife viewing access into perpetuity on Riverdale Ranch.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission Approve the Department's recommendation to purchase a conservation easement on the Riverdale Ranch.